



The Insider

www.senate.mi.gov/switalski

Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10

September 15, 2006

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a library near you. Call my office and make an appointment or just walk in. See schedule for details.

Mickey's Blog: A Week To Remember

I had a great week in the Senate. First of all, two of my bills passed in the Appropriations Committee and then through the full Senate the next day.

One was a bill I have worked on for nearly a year. Everyone knows we have a nursing shortage, but no one does much besides complain about it. I had been bugging Universities and Colleges to expand their nursing schools, but educating nurses is costly, schools are struggling, and they don't have the money to subsidize the expansion of their programs. And the state isn't exactly flush either.

But unemployment is high and people need jobs. How can we let nursing jobs, which are well paid, sit empty while we try to import nurses from outside Michigan and outside the country? Clearly we should educate our own citizens to fill these jobs.

So about a year ago I started meeting with Barbara Rossman, CEO at St. Joe's Mercy in Clinton Township, along with high level representatives from Mount Clemens General, Henry Ford, and St. John Hospitals. We sat at a conference table with Deans from the nursing schools at Baker College, Macomb Community College, Oakland University and Wayne State University, and talked about how to help fix this problem.

We started out thinking we had to expand nursing schools, but the more we got into it we decided our real bottleneck was the lack of Master's Degreed instructors who could teach the Clinical portion of the nursing programs. We developed some proposals, and I worked to get some help from the State. I was eventually successful in getting a quarter of a million dollar appropriation into the higher education budget for scholarships for nurses who wanted to pursue a Master's Degree. We already have \$5 million in scholarships for undergraduate nurses, but I think we aren't spending that money as effectively as we could.

Since we are already turning away 2,900 nursing school applicants a year because of a lack of space, I don't think we need to offer scholarships to attract people to nursing. With 7% unemployment, people

are smart enough to come to where the jobs are. We needed to find a way to expand the number of nursing school slots.

The new money, and the freedom to spend it on Scholarships for Master's Degree candidates, will mean more slots. The schools were struggling to find instructors, and now some nurses who would have retired will work part-time, get a degree, and teach new nurses part-time. The hospitals will gain nurses by retaining ones who would have quit, and by creating newer ones quicker.

The beauty of this policy was so apparent to my colleagues that for the first time in living memory, I got all 38 Senators to co-sponsor my bill, and it passed this week unanimously.

But that wasn't all.

I also got a Revenue Sharing bill passed which continues the funding Freeze for the 4th year. That may not sound like such a great bill, but it was part of the budget agreement that allowed us to balance our books in these tight times. And since no one likes to freeze aid given to local governments, the bill was a challenge to pass. Lots of people want to vote against it, even though they understand it has to pass.

So I got to spend lots of time mediating disputes, lining up votes, working with both sides to ensure what had to happen would happen as smoothly as possible. That is some of the most fun I have had in my job.

Then came the icing on the cake. I got notified, out of the blue, that the Senate Energy and Technology Committee would be taking up my bill to mandate at least 2% ethanol in all gas sold in Michigan. That is a landmark bill, a significant policy initiative. And in the Republican-controlled Senate, this privilege wouldn't normally be granted to a Democrat like me who isn't even on the Committee.

But I was in, and it was the only bill on the agenda, so I would have the Committee's full attention. I prepared for three days and had my entire staff immerse themselves in the minutia of Alternative Fuels. We would debate the merits of covalent polarity and nitrogen oxide non attainment areas with the technical experts on conference calls, and review the scholarly literature on net energy balance, octane ratings and fuel efficiency and vaporization rates. We would have extended bull sessions around my conference table on the value of mandates versus incentives.

And I got to have an open and frank exchange of views with the eight members of the Committee. I loved it. I didn't get my bill passed, because big oil doesn't want to be told what to do, and it doesn't want the competition of ethanol, either.

And the farmers want 10%, not 2%, and at this point they won't take anything less.

But I got what I wanted, which was a work group to meet on the issues and seek a compromise. And I got appointed to the work group.

As you can see, I live a simple life. My needs are small. And I felt like I had done a pretty good job for you.

Enjoy the Weekend.

Mickey's TV Insider Show

Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

Sterling Heights

Every Saturday and Sunday at 1 p.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Utica

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Clinton Township

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Roseville

Various Times
(Comcast Channel 18)

*Please note that Sterling Heights/Utica/Clinton Township will show the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 5 and Wide Open West Channel 10. Clinton Township will air the TV Insider Show at various times during the last week of every month. Roseville can see the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 18.

Coffee Hours

*Since my District Office is in Roseville, I do not have set coffee hours in Roseville. However, I encourage you to visit the Roseville office. We even have a coffee pot. Everyone is welcome to attend the coffee hours and discuss their issues and concerns.

September 25
7-9 p.m.

Location: Clinton-Macomb Public Library
(35891 Gratiot)
Clinton Township

October 2
7-9 p.m.

Location: Sterling Heights Public Library
(40255 Dodge Park)
Sterling Heights

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